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'God for Us' slated for Evangelism Conf.

By Carl M. White
Associate Editor

Preparations are underway for the Mississippi Baptist presentation of the popular Christian musical, "God for Us," scheduled for January 22 at 2 p.m. in the Mississippi Coliseum in Jackson, according to Graham Smith, director of the Church Music Department of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board (MBCB).

Admission is free and the event is open to the public.

The musical is a major part of the 2000 Mississippi Baptist Evangelism Conference, which begins January 21 at 1:30 p.m. at Ridgecrest Church in Madison.

S. A. "Sonny" Adkins, director of the MBCB Evangelism Department and coordinator of the annual conference, said the theme for this year's conference is "Lift High the Cross."

at the coliseum around mid-morning on January 22. A one-time rehearsal will begin at noon.

"We're starting the year 2000 with this time of worship and praise," Smith said, and he hopes the presentation will serve as a uniting force for believers all across Mississippi.

"The Celebrate Jesus 2000 emphasis is what instigated this presentation, so this presentation is under the banner of pointing people to the Lord Jesus as the Lord of the new millennium," Smith added.

Smith said that a number of churches are bringing their banners as part of the celebration.

"There will also be the flags of all the nations where Southern Baptists have missionaries, along with several missionaries in native dress," Smith said.

"The last song of 'God for Us,' sums up what this worship celebration is about. 'Every tongue, every tribe, every people, every land, giving glory, giving honor, giving praise unto the Lamb of God.'"



"That is what we are proclaiming," Smith said. "Here in our state, this is what we believe, that God is God of all of us."

For more information about "God for Us," contact Smith at P. O. Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205-0530. Telephone: (601) 292-3267, or toll-free outside Jackson (800) 748-1651, ext. 267.

For more information on the 2000 Mississippi Baptist Evangelism Conference, contact Adkins at the above address. Telephone (601) 292-3278, or toll-free outside Jackson (800) 748-1651, ext. 278.



NARRATING AND DIRECTING — Jim Futral (right), then pastor of Broadmoor Church, Jackson, and now executive director/treasurer of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board (MBCB), narrates for the Jan. 19, 1998 production of God with Us in the Mississippi Coliseum. Behind him, Graham Smith, director of the Church Music Department for MBCB, conducts the 2,000-voice choir and 140-piece orchestra. (Photo by Tim Nicholas)

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Speakers for the evangelism conference include Jerry Pipes of the North American Mission Board (NAMB) Phil Roberts of NAMB; Alabama evangelist Junior Hill, and others.

The "God for Us" musical will feature a 3,000-voice choir from 105 churches across Mississippi — and one church from Alabama, Smith said.

"We welcome any church choir to join with us," Smith said.

The choirs will be accompanied by the Mississippi Baptist Symphony Orchestra, which Smith anticipates will have over 200 musicians for the performance.

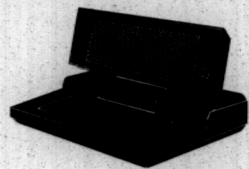
The orchestra has a rehearsal retreat planned for January 21 at 6 p.m. at Pearl High School's new band hall in Pearl. The orchestra rehearsal will continue on January 22 at 8:30 a.m. in Mississippi Coliseum.

Smith urged the various choirs to arrive



WITH VOICES RAISED — Members of the 2,000-voice mass choir and 140-piece orchestra perform during the Jan. 19, 1998 production of the musical God with Us in the Mississippi Coliseum. (Photo by Tim Nicholas)

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK



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Taking back the 'Holiday Season'

As Christmas Day arrives each year, it's difficult for a Christian not to notice how the appointed birthday of Jesus has been hijacked by our obsessively materialistic culture. What should be a celebrative, respectful, and humble observation of the arrival of the long-promised Savior has been so twisted into bacchanalian overkill that its original purpose has been all but swept away.

Christmas Day — the spiritually-unique, one-day annual event in our lives — has been magically transformed into the "Holiday Season," the better to extend the gift-buying period. Even the so-called "Holiday Season" has been extended to begin around Thanksgiving and end some time around New Years Day, the better to extend the artifice to the max.

It's not unusual in our part of the country to spot Christmas... er, excuse me, "Holiday Season" decorations in stores beginning the first week of October. When the temperatures are still in the high 80s and people are wearing shorts to the mall, it's near impossible to get excited about a mechanical Santa Claus dressed in red flannel tossing fake snow in a storefront window to the tune of Jingle Bell Rock.

Advertisements count down the days until Christmas. Retailers issue ominous warnings to beat the crowds and not wait until all the good gifts are gone. In our country today, what greater social sin is there than giving a picked-over, second-rate gift? How gauche!

Which only leads to the defining statement of modern American society: What do you get for someone who already has everything? Sadly, the answer is usually something as useless as it is expensive.

The news media recently reported the conclusions of a group of researchers who have studied the American buying psyche. They found that monetary expenditure itself has become the end rather than the means to an end.

In other words, Americans don't spend money for the purpose of acquiring material possessions, however useless those material possessions may be to everyday life.

No, Americans spend money just for the sheer thrill of spending money, according to the researchers. It doesn't matter on what the money is spent and how much is spent, just as long as it is spent.

One needn't be a respected researcher to reach such conclusions, however. Just visit any shopping center or mall during the month of December. At no other time of year is this flagrant behavior more on display than during the magical "Holiday Season."

It's enough to bring to mind the image from so many old, black-and-white movies of the wealthy business magnate lighting his cigar with a \$100 bill. That image is essentially the lifestyle we've adopted in the America of today.

As Christians, we need to ask ourselves if this type of conduct brings honor to the One whose birthday once meant something at this time of year other than massive overindulgence. In other words, what would Jesus do?

We have a record of Jesus' life that inarguably leaves no doubt about what he would do. He wouldn't be at the mall jostling for position at the check-out register. He wouldn't be preemptively purchas-

"I WANT ALL THESE CHILDREN AND THEIR COUNTERPARTS THROUGHOUT THE WORLD TO KNOW THE TRUE MEANING OF CHRISTMAS!"



ing antacids for his coming holiday feast, and he sure wouldn't be standing in line at the liquor store to pay for the false spirits of the "Holiday Season."

What, then, would Jesus be doing at this time of year and, by extension as his followers, what should we be doing this time of year?

Read your Bible and pray for the type of insight only the Lord can provide, and the picture will become crystal clear. Jesus left us the model; we need only heed it.

Isn't it about time we started living as if we believed Jesus is who he said he is? The "Holiday Season," it would seem, might well be the perfect place to start.

No BR on December 30

Due to postal regulations that limit The Baptist Record to fifty issues per year, the newspaper will not publish on December 30. The next issue of The Baptist Record will be dated January 6, 2000.

The staff of The Baptist Record wishes for you and your family a joyous observance of the birth of our Savior.

Our Dear Heavenly Father:

As we now leave the past thousand years to the ages, we ask Lord that the precious days, weeks, months, years, decades, and centuries that you have provided to previous generations have not passed without mankind gaining the knowledge, insight, and compassion to form the world environment that you intended us to inhabit. Let us not abandon all that we have learned from our past; but grant us the wisdom to use this knowledge to secure a better future in the new millennium.

Instill in our scientists the insight they need to discover and develop new sources of energy that will reduce our need for non-renewable resources.

GUEST OPINION:

Prayer for the Millennium

By Charles Hendrix, member
Pinelake Church, Brandon

Guide our physicians and medical researchers as they strive to solve the mysteries of afflictions and dreaded diseases and consequently to bring about the suffering which they bring. Bless the leaders of our society who must deal with rapid change. Provide them the wisdom to attack and defeat evil forces and the moral meltdown that is gain-

ing a foothold in our neighborhoods. Lord, give our leadership the power and abilities needed to conquer violence, drugs, teen pregnancy, cynicism, despair, economic chaos, and racism.

Dear Lord, stand beside our public servants, the police, and the firefighters of our communities. Let us not forget that they are available to serve and

protect us during times of disasters and civil disobedience when danger lurks out of the hysteria and confusion.

O Heavenly Father, we know there is still much to be learned about your infinite universe. We pray you will grant our teachers the guidance to inspire their students to continue to seek answers to the questions past generations could only wonder about.

Let not this generation, and all future generations in the coming millennium, forget to abide by the laws, rules, and commands that you have provided in the scriptures. Confer upon us an understanding that we must grow and evolve within your guidelines in order to make a difference in the next thousand years. Amen

Book offers new clues on Bethlehem Star

NEW BRUNSWICK, N.J. (ABP) — It's a question that has intrigued scientists and theologians for centuries: What was the Star of Bethlehem?

A new book suggests the answer to the mystery may be found in the records of ancient astrology.

Astronomer Michael Molnar says his theory is bolstered by an ancient coin he bought for his collection at a coin show in New York for \$50. The coin, originally from Antioch, the ancient capital of Syria, depicts the astrological figure Aries the Ram looking back at a star.

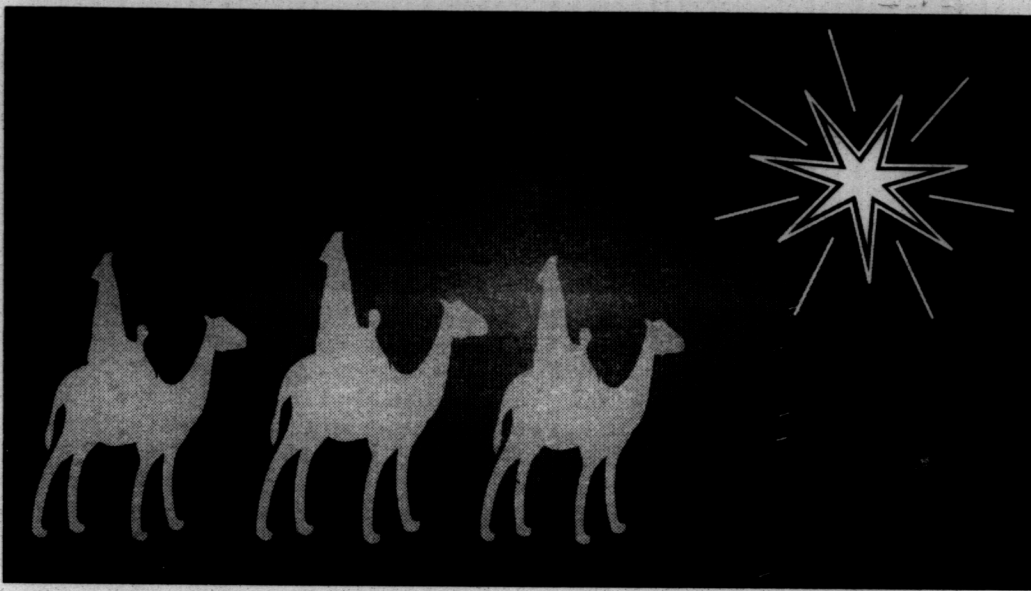
In his research, Molnar found that Aries first appeared on coins from Antioch when the Romans annexed Judea, an event mentioned in the Gospel of Luke. At the time of Christ's birth, he says, Aries was a symbol for the Jews. Ancient astrologers also believed that a new king would be born when the moon passed in front of Jupiter, creating an eclipse.

Curious about whether the coin might commemorate an astrological event, Molnar used computer models to determine that an eclipse of Jupiter in Aries occurred "in the east" on April 17, 6 B.C. — a year that many Bible scholars believe is about the time Jesus was born.

While the event would not have been as spectacular from an astronomical perspective as other theories such as an exploding star, a comet, or an alignment of planets, Molnar says it would have been sensational for astrologers in the first century.

The "magi" — people who were regarded in the ancient Near East to be healers, interpreters of omens and dreams, and able to predict the future by using astrology — would have viewed the occurrence as portending the birth of a divine king, Molnar says.

Molnar first presented his theory several years ago in



"Sky and Telescope" magazine, and now has compiled his research into a book, "The Star of Bethlehem: The Story of the Magi," published by Rutgers University Press.

In the book, he discusses how his research coincides with the writings of ancient Roman astrologers about the position of the planets during the time of Christ's birth.

"We can be assured that the extraordinary conditions of April 17, 6 B.C., were as real and dramatic as any blazing comet or exploding supernova," writes Molnar. "Unlike those spectacular but terribly foreboding or meaningless apparitions, the portent formed in Aries by Jupiter and other celestial bodies conveyed a joyous, wondrous message about a regal and divine birth in the kingdom of Herod the Great. Now we can look at the star above a creche at Christmas and know that there was indeed a Star of Bethlehem."

While Molnar says he conducted his research and writing in a "religiously neutral" fashion, his conclusions lend credence to the account of Christ's birth in Matthew. The Bible's reporting the star being seen "in the east" and that it "went before and stood over" are astrological terms, he says.

He says his findings do not prove that Jesus was born on April 17, 6 B.C., when the star appeared. That is up for Bible scholars to decide, he says.

Ironically, Molnar says the subject was not one about which he was initially curious.

"I was not originally interested in analyzing the Star of Bethlehem," Molnar said in a telephone interview from his home near Piscataway, N. J., "but once I came across the coin and started piecing some of the information together, I felt obligated to pursue it."

Molnar's book has been well-received among Christians who say it backs up the Bible with scientific evidence. His conclusions have also drawn enthusiastic support in academic circles.

Even experts not familiar with Molnar and his theories say he may be onto something. Bill Adams, a physicist at Baylor University in Waco, Texas, said if Molnar's research is indeed accurate, it could lend credence to ancient astrologers' writings about the celestial events surrounding Christ's birth.

A planet, said Adams, would have been visible for the many months it took the three Wise Men to travel to Bethlehem. "If [Jupiter] was in the constellation [Aries], it would certainly have been there for some time," Adams said.

Dudley Shapere, professor of philosophy and history of science at Wake Forest

University in Wake Forest, N.C., said he has heard speculation that Jupiter may have been present during that time, but he adds that many scientists believe the planet was part of a cluster of planets that would have drifted apart after a few days. That cluster, though probably quite luminous, would not have remained in the sky long enough for the three Wise Men to follow it during a journey that lasted many weeks, Shapere said.

Moreover, Shapere believes astrologers of the time knew enough about Jupiter that, if it actually was the star of Bethlehem, they would have referred to the planet specifically.

John Killinger, the author of several dozen theological books and a former professor at Vanderbilt Divinity School in Nashville, said while Molnar's theory is intriguing, it really shouldn't affect Christians' basic convictions about Christ.



MISSISSIPPI
BAPTISTS

THE
SECOND
FRONT PAGE

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Missionaries set for handover

PANAMA CITY, Panama (BP) — Special missionary teams have been assigned to target the different nationalities living within the "barriadas," or suburbs, of the Panama Canal Zone, after the U.S.-controlled area is finally handed over to the Panamanian government on Dec. 31.

The teams include International Mission Board (IMB) missionaries Mark and Mary Fuller and Greg and Cathy Muse. The Muses will target Chinese communities.

Panama strategy leader Wirt Davis anticipates a smooth transition for IMB missionaries working in Panama.

"We don't expect many changes overall, but we are focusing a team on the barriadas," Davis said. "These people are first-time homeowners, and they are going through a lot of changes in their lives and might be receptive to the gospel."

Currently, Baptist work is being started in three locations. Fuller said the Canal Zone is a tough place to minister. "There is so much spiritual apathy present," he said. "As far as we can tell, there are no other churches in these areas. The people are just not interested."

Despite the disinterest, Fuller is excited about the possibilities. Once interest is sparked, commitment runs deep and a genuine hunger to learn more about Christ surfaces, he said.

Looking back

10 years ago

The City of Faith Medical Center at Oral Roberts University in Tulsa, Okla., releases its last patient and will close its doors, announces founder Oral Roberts. This comes five weeks after the announced firing of 250 employees. Roberts' 4,000-student college in Tulsa remains open.

20 years ago

The Christmas parade float of Trinity Church, Carthage, claims first place in the religious category and is the Grand Prize trophy winner in the 1979 Carthage Christmas parade. The theme of the 39-unit annual city parade was "Peace on Earth."

50 years ago

Christmas Day is dedicated as Victory Sunday for First Church, Bay St. Louis, which has raised \$2,500 so the church will be debt-free for the first day of 1950. Pastor John T. Dearly, Jr. says each member was asked to make a special Christmas gift to the Lord to retire the debt.

Evangelist putting feet to Gospel message

By William H. Perkins Jr.
Editor

When Mississippi evangelist Buster Wilson heard the plea to take the Gospel message along the highways and byways, he took it seriously.



TREK ACROSS MISSISSIPPI — Mississippi evangelist Buster Wilson (second from left) of Richland recently visited the Baptist Building in Jackson with the 12-foot-long cross that he plans to carry across Mississippi in the year 2000. Joining Wilson in prayer for the crosswalk effort were (from left) Ed Deuschle, consultant in the Evangelism Department of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board (MBCB); S.A. "Sonny" Adkins, MBCB evangelism director; Jim Futral, MBCB executive director-treasurer; and Dan Robertson, pastor of First Church, Natchez, and Wilson's brother-in-law. (Photo by William H. Perkins Jr.)

That's why he went to work on a hand-crafted, 12-foot-long representation of the cross upon which Christ made the Gospel a reality for mankind, and he plans to carry the finished product from one end of the state to the other.

By William H. Perkins Jr.
Editor

Navigating deserted back roads in complete darkness. A cross burned on a lawn. Bright headlights following too closely, too late at night. Anonymous threats. Living long enough to see a dream realized and his beloved state changed.

Richard Brogan's 43-year ministry of racial reconciliation could be the basis for a Hollywood screenplay, if only Hollywood made movies about ministers who faithfully follow God's call despite the danger to life and career.

As Brogan prepares to retire at the end of the year from his position as the consultant for black church extension, chaplaincy, seminary extension, and student summer missions in the Strategic Ministries Department of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board, he reminisced about the providence and protection provided by the Lord at crucial points in his ministry.

"I was placed in a position of being a peacemaker and, hopefully, creating some good will between two races that were at each other's throats," he said.

There was definitely a shortage of good will in the 1960s for making peace between the races in Mississippi, as anyone who lived through that era can attest. Brogan forged ahead, however.

"I remember being followed home from a meeting at an

Wilson will kick off his 'Mississippi Crosswalk' with a January 2 rally on the steps of the New Capitol in Jackson. The rally will begin at 3 p.m. with "a few minutes of praise and preaching," Wilson said.

"The message of the Cross is the power of God. My preaching is Cross-centered and grace-based — that God is only satisfied with what Jesus did on the Cross.

"The Cross is the best-known symbol in the world. What better way to focus on Christ in the new millennium?" he asked.

Wilson said he did his first Crosswalk in Hattiesburg a few years ago as part of a Sanctity of Human Life observance, and he has also done a Crosswalk in Richland, where he lives.

Wilson listed his goals for the Mississippi Crosswalk as:

- ♦ reaching 10,000 people for Christ in the year 2000, as the Crosswalk moves around the state.
- ♦ preaching, wherever possible along the way, the unchanging message of eternal salvation through Jesus Christ.
- ♦ promoting the Celebrate Jesus 2000 (CJ2000) campaign to reach America with the Gospel.

"I have a real hunger for our state coming to Christ. Celebrate Jesus 2000 is a good theme in which to wrap it all up," he explained.

Wilson said the huge cross he carries is meant to make people think about their salvation.

"You can't miss it. It's a big cross, and you've got to mentally deal with it when you see it. You've got to think about it, even if only for a minute," he said.

Wilson said he has encountered no negative reactions on his past crosswalks.

"People blow their car horns and give the '1-Way' sign. It's a most blessed experience when people stop and want to talk," he said. The uniqueness of his ministry draws curiosity-seekers and that leads to opportunities for Christian witnessing.

A lot of people want to know about the wheel attached to the foot of the cross. Wilson said many folks think it's there to make his burden easier, but that's not the case, he pointed out.

"Concrete and asphalt wear down the wood at the rate of about one inch per mile. If it wasn't for the wheel, I'd have a toothpick at the end of the day," he explained.

Wilson said he has turned this mission completely over to God.

"In every way — financially, physical strength, health, preaching — it's a total faith walk. I'm depending on the Lord to take every situation and use it for his glory," he said.

Wilson will spend the month of January crosswalking the Jackson metropolitan area, and then will spread out across the state as invitations come in and the Lord leads. He will also appear at the Mississippi Baptist Evangelism Conference January 21-22 at Ridgecrest Church, Madison.

As a vocational evangelist, Wilson is available during his Mississippi Crosswalk for revivals, crusades, Bible conferences, and one-night "CJ2000" rallies. For more information, contact him at 331 Lewis Street, Richland, MS 39218. Telephone: (601) 936-4297. E-mail: busterevan@iolms.com.

Brogan to retire from fulfilling, 'terrifying' ministry

By William H. Perkins Jr.
Editor

African-American church in the Delta. An African-American preacher and I were riding together that night. The car followed us closely for several miles; we didn't know what was going to happen," he recalled.

The car eventually dropped away, and Brogan and his passenger arrived home safely.

"That was terrifying," Brogan said.

There was also a cross burned on his lawn late one night when he lived in Soso.

"Nothing happens instantly. The work of racial reconciliation was a challenge then, and it continues to be a challenge today," he observed.

Brogan became immersed in the ministry of racial reconciliation while serving as a contract

consultant for Mississippi Baptists from 1967-71.

It was there that he worked with the late W.P. Davis, a Mississippi Baptist legendary for his forward-looking relationships with African-American churches and ministers in the state during the time of greatest turmoil among the races.

Brogan signed on as a full-time consultant with the convention board in August 1971, and was director of work with National Baptists until he departed 1978 to become president of predominantly African-American Mississippi Baptist Seminary in Jackson.

Brogan returned to the Baptist Building in 1988 to direct Mississippi Baptists' program to facilitate new church

starts in the African-American community, and he eventually took on other duties including work with chaplains and the Mississippi River Ministry.

He foresees promise as racial reconciliation efforts mature.

"I hope more and more African-Americans will be given the opportunity — and will accept the responsibility — of helping shape the Mississippi Baptist Convention for the future. I believe the future belongs to Christians who can do ministry together; everyone has something to bring to the Lord's table," he pointed out.

Statistics from Southern Baptist Convention agencies indicate that the strongest rates of growth in the denomination are increasingly being recorded by churches that do not fit the traditional ethnic and racial profiles of the convention.

Southern Baptists count about 2,800 African-American churches as members of the national convention, and about 25 African-American churches in Mississippi relate to the state convention.

"From these churches will come missionaries, church staffers, denominational workers, and many others who will carry the message of Christ around the world," Brogan said.

"We need to work hard at being the church of Jesus Christ, as he meant it to be. If we can do that, we can change the culture," he said.



Brogan

NOBTS to offer courses at Miss. locations

The New Orleans Seminary (NOBTS) extension center in Jackson is offering classes this spring at Broadmoor Church in Madison, according to Julius Thompson, center director.

In the undergraduate program, three different three-hour classes are offered on Mondays beginning Jan. 24. The first course, New Testament Survey, is taught by Jim Burnett, pastor of Raymond Road Church, Jackson.

Thompson is teaching Introduction to Church Administration, from 1-4 p.m. Also, from 7-10 p.m., Old Testament Interpretation: 8th Century Prophets of Israel, is being taught by Keith Gordon, consultant with the Pastoral Ministries Department of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board (MBCB).

Courses are \$95.00 per semester hour for Southern Baptist students, \$105.00 for other Baptists, and \$190.00 for non-Baptist students.

Thompson cautioned students to remember that the classes are being held at Broadmoor Church's new campus on Highland Colony Parkway in Madison. Students who have not participated in testing and orientation are required to attend on Jan. 17.

Courses are also being offered in the Bible Teaching Certificate program and the Church Music Certificate program.

In the Bible Teaching Certificate program, an Old Testament study, Genesis to II Chronicles is offered Jan. 24 - March 13 (meeting each Monday) at 7 p.m., taught by Frank Thomas, pastor of Alta Woods Church, Jackson.

The course on the Life of Christ is offered from March 27 - May 15 at 7 p.m. (meeting each Monday), taught by Carl White, associate editor of The Baptist Record.

January 24 begins the third of eight courses at nine locations in Mississippi for the NOBTS bivocational music classes.

The total eight courses are: Song Leading; Worship Planning; Reading Music: Rhythm/Pitch; Reading Music: Harmony/Melody; Hymn-ology; Music Administration/Staff Relations; Survey of Music Resources; Class Voice. These courses are designed to provide basic training for bivocational music directors and other music leaders in churches.

The eight courses meet two hours per

week. Each course is eight weeks in length.

The cycle of courses is scheduled over a two-year period. Each course is independent and has no prerequisite. Each student who completes the eight courses earns a Church Music Certificate from New Orleans Seminary plus a credit of eight hours toward an on-campus degree program. There is a one-time registration fee of \$25. The cost of each course is \$75.

The third course, "Reading Music: Rhythm/Pitch," will meet once a week for two hours for eight consecutive weeks at the following locations and times:

- First Church, Cleveland — beginning January 24 (7-9 p.m.) Ian Richardson, teacher.

- Broadmoor Church, Jackson — beginning January 24 (7-9 p.m.) Jimmy McCaleb, teacher.

- First Church, Columbus — beginning January 24 (7-9 p.m.) Bobby Sanderson, teacher.

- First Church, Purvis — beginning

January 24 (6:30-8:30 p.m.) James Hayes, teacher.

- First Church, Booneville — beginning January 24 (7-9 p.m.) LuAnne Ford, teacher.

- Northcrest Church, Meridian — beginning January 24 (6:30-8:30 p.m.) Buddy McElroy, teacher.

- Hernando Church, Hernando — beginning January 24 (7-9 p.m.) Barry Tweedy, teacher.

- Tri-County Association, Columbia — beginning January 25 (6:30-8:30 p.m.) Kenny Adams, teacher.

- First Church, Summit — beginning January 24 (7-9 p.m.) Doug Spires, teacher.

These classes could be offered at other locations in the state also, where 10-12 students are interested in enrolling.

For more information, contact Thompson at 117 Napa Valley Circle, Madison, MS 39110. Telephone: (601) 856-4341; or the NOBTS College of Undergraduate Studies at (800) 514-4341.

New Sunday School lesson writers named

New writers for the Sunday School lessons in The Baptist Record, based on the curriculum lines of LifeWay Christian Resources in Nashville, have been named for the December 1999 - February 2000 quarter.

Writing for the Family Bible Series is K. Lynn Jones, pastor for First Church, Booneville. Jones, a Louisiana native, was educated at Northwestern State University in Natchitoches, La., and Southwestern Seminary in Ft. Worth, where he was awarded the Doctor of Philosophy degree in 1981.

Jones previously pastored Highland Church, Shreveport, La., before going to First Church, Booneville in 1995. He has also pastored churches in Texas.

Jones previously wrote Sunday School lessons for Lifeway Christian Resources. His last assignment was the



Jones

April-June 1986 Young Adult Bible Study for the Life and Work Series. He is married to the former Danielle Volk of Florien, La. They have one son.

Carl M. White is writing for the Explore the Bible Series. White is associate editor of The Baptist Record. He previously pastored Clarksdale Church, Clarksdale. He is a graduate of the University of Southern Mississippi in Hattiesburg and Southern Seminary in Louisville, Ky. He and his wife Frances have three children and live in Clinton.



White

Michael L. Jones is the associate pastor/minister of youth at Monticello Church, Monticello. He is writing the Life and Work series lessons. Jones has served at Monticello Church since 1995. An Alabama native, Jones is a graduate of Samford University in Birmingham.

He is currently pursuing the Master of Christian Education degree at New Orleans Seminary.

Jones has also served as youth minister in Alabama. He and wife Julie have two children.

The Baptist Record provides Sunday School lessons as a supplement to the curriculum material available from Lifeway and as a service to readers. The views expressed by the lesson writers are their own, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board or Lifeway Christian Resources.

Mississippi Baptists interested in writing Sunday School lessons for The Baptist Record should contact associate editor Carl White at P. O. Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205-0530. Telephone (601) 292-3217, or toll-free outside Jackson (800) 748-1651, ext. 217.



Jones

AVOID THE "VIRTUAL" CHRISTMAS

Computers and related technologies have brought us into a world of unreality. It is a world of "virtualism." When something is "virtual" it is almost real, but it is not the "real deal!" Almost every game that mankind has ever played has been reduced to a virtual experience. If you would like to play — whether basketball, football, golf, or fishing — you can plug-in, turn-on, join-in, and feel the competition. It even looks real but it is "virtual."

This year the Christmas buying season has seen e-commerce take a giant step forward as millions of people have done "virtual" shopping. In just a matter of seconds you can turn on your computer and visit any major store or company in America and purchase their products without having to get



Directions

Jim Futral, executive director-treasurer
Mississippi Baptist Convention Board

up, get dressed, drive to the mall, find a parking place, push and shove through the crowds, and find a clerk who will take your money or credit card. You can have those goods delivered to your door! Just in case you didn't know, there is no sense in worrying about getting a Christmas tree or putting up lights or dragging out ornaments, for with a simple click of the mouse you can put dancing, blinking, singing Christmas trees all over your computer and have animated

animals and folks of all kinds visiting you and making sounds eighteen inches from your face — "virtual" decorations!

"Virtual" means to appear to be almost real, but isn't. In the creation of our "virtual" world, there are dimensions of reality. In fact, there are enough components of the real, that many people get lost in knowing what is real and what is not. One thing is for certain: it's possible to experience a "virtual" Christmas and never know the real thing.

Just think about all of the aspects that have become associated with Christmas that have nothing to do with Christmas: snow, bells, reindeer, Santa, candy, trees, ornaments, paper, elves, donkeys, drummer boys, and you can add to the list. Of course, the real issue is none of those things, but rather the personal relationship that God desires to have with us through his Savior Son, Jesus Christ.

Let me encourage you to take a short but very meaningful and personal journey down a road that leads to that special relationship with Jesus. Open your Bible to Luke 2 and begin at verse one and walk down the dusty trails until you meet God's saving Son. Then pause to talk with him, thank him, enjoy him, and recommit your life to him. You will find it is not a "virtual" experience, but reality to the depths of your heart!

Merry Christmas!

JUST FOR THE RECORD



Lewis, Bright, Cannon, and Thomas

Parkway Church, Houston, celebrated its 30th anniversary on Oct. 24. During the morning service charter members and former staff were recognized. Plaques were presented to the former pastors. The morning message was brought by Aaron Lewis, first pastor. This was followed by dinner on the grounds. During the afternoon

service testimonies were given by former pastors and members. "Parkway Church has grown from 15 to over 550 members since it was organized," said Gregg Thomas, pastor. Pictured (from left) are Lewis, Ira Bright, James Cannon, and Thomas. Another former pastor, David Kendall is deceased, but his widow, Ruby, was present for the day.

The youth ministry of First Church, Coldwater, ministered to the homeless men of Calvary Rescue Mission in Memphis, Tenn. They cooked and served the evening meal and led in a chapel service for the men. The youth go to Calvary the first Saturday of each month to minister.



Forty-five women from Fifteenth Avenue Church, Meridian, recently traveled to Central Hills Retreat for their fourth annual ladies' retreat. Diana Bird led Bible study and Laurie Coburn, Baton Rouge, La., led worship.



Youth ministry of First Church, Coldwater



First Church, Nesbit, recently held ground breaking for a new 11,000 square foot multi-ministry building. Construction was started in November and is expected to be completed the end of July or early August, 2000. The building will include space for a fellowship hall, basketball court, craft room, commercial kitchen, recreation room, library, and a prayer room. Participating in the ground breaking was the building committee: Paul Wadsworth, chairman; Evelyn Bearden, Bob Green; Nina Jolly; Bobby Pace; Wayne Shelton; and Mildred Young. Don Nolan served as a special consultant to the committee. Building committee pictured (from left) are Shelton, Bearden, Nolan, Wadsworth, Jolly, Young, and Green. Kirk Germany led the church in a prayer of consecration and dedication of its new building.



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NAMES IN THE NEWS



Nerren and Hurst

Robinhood Church, Brandon, honored James E. Hurst, deacon, with a resolution plaque presented by Don Nerren, pastor. Hurst has been a deacon at Robinhood Church for 12 years. Pictured (from left) are Nerren and Hurst.

Glen W. Smith, pastor of Fellowship Church, Taylorsville, for seven years, received his Doctor of Philosophy in Christian Counseling from Covington Theological Seminary in Rossville, Ga., on Dec. 2.



Morrison Chapel Church, Cleveland, recently ordained Jimmy Alford and James Long as deacons. Pictured (from left) are Alford; Long; and John Arthur Thomas, pastor.

Gunter Road Church, Florence, ordained Mark Turner as deacon, Dec. 12. Pictured (from left) are Gene Jordan, pastor; Turner; and Grady Martin, chairman of deacons.



Jordan, Turner, and Martin

Members of Central Grove Church, Aberdeen, with perfect attendance in Sunday School, pictured (front row) are Lois Nicholson, Linda Williams, Kate Chism, Halie Irvin, Bobbie Smitley, and Vickie Langford; (back row) E. G. Nicholson, Glen Payne, M. J. Gallop, Brett Smitley, Joel Smitley, and Patrick Gallop. Vickie Langford is also Sunday School Teacher of the Year. Dennis Smitley is pastor.

Victory Church, Bassfield, ordained Andrew Aultman (left) and Robert Summers



Members of Central Grove Church, Aberdeen

(right) as deacons on Oct. 3. Making presentation of certificates is Clifford Rutland, chairman of deacons. Charles Broome is pastor.



Aultman, Rutland, and Summers



Thad Moore (second from left) was installed November 14 as pastor of Poplar Springs Drive Baptist Church in Meridian. Congratulating Moore at a reception held in his honor after the installment service were (from left) M.L. Coleman, deacon chairman; Moore's wife Kim; and Lamar McDonald, chairman of the pastor search committee. Moore's previous pastorate was First Church, Holly Springs.

Lamar Seminary offers classes

The Lamar Baptist Seminary Extension Center is offering the following classes in the spring semester: "Survey of Baptist Missions," taught by Tommy Odom will meet at Gateway Church, Lumberton, and "Isaiah," taught by Glenn Davis, will meet at First Church, Sumrall. Registration will take place at the class location on Jan. 4 at 7 p.m. Classes will begin on Jan. 11. For further information, contact Glenn Davis at (601) 758-4738 or 758-4589.

Church Night

Friday, January 14, 2000
7 p.m.

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All tickets will be at will call.

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BAPTIST COLLEGE NEWS

William Carey College Speech and Debate Team (Forensics) placed third overall at the Patriot Games Speech Tournament held recently at the University of Texas at Tyler. The team also placed second in

Individual Events Sweepstakes. Members of the team were Chris Smith, Petal; Samantha Cottrell, Crystal Springs; Emanuel Buckley, Hattiesburg; Matthew Smith, McComb; Mandy Mozingo, Poplarville; Emily Strickland, Panama City, Fla.; and Mandy Trammell, Florence.

William Carey College will celebrate Homecoming 2000 on Jan. 28-29 on the Hattiesburg campus. On Jan. 27, a Symphonic Winds Concert will be held at 7 p.m. in the Dumas L. Smith Auditorium. General registration will be held Friday from 2-6:30

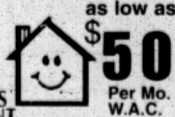
p.m. in the Bentley-Pope House. Registration on Saturday will be 8-4 p.m. On Saturday, a 5K Walk/Run will begin at 9 a.m. with registration at 8:30 a.m. The Awards Luncheon will be held at 12:30 p.m. in the Wilkes Dining Hall followed by the Lady Crusaders versus Louisiana College basketball game at 2:30 p.m. The Crusaders will play the Wildcats at 4:30 p.m. The crowning of the 2000 Homecoming Queen will be held at half time. For more information about Homecoming 2000, contact the Alumni Office at (601) 582-6107 or (800) 962-5991, ext. 107.

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State conventions hold annual meetings

NORTH DAKOTA
BISMARCK, N.D. (BP) — "I feel like I went to a business meeting and ended up at a revival," reflected pastor Dave Bohlander after the Oct. 21-22 annual meeting of the Dakota Southern Baptist Fellowship.

It was "very hard to leave" once the sessions had ended, said Bohlander, pastor of Capitol Heights Church in Pierre, S.D., because "the brotherly love amongst the fellow pastors felt so good."

W.D. "Doc" Lindsey, the

the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) Cooperative Program remains the same — 37.5%.

Funds received over the budget, in a change from current practice, will be released in a missions challenge budget with one-third for the SBC International Mission Board, one-third to the SBC North American Mission Board, and one-third to remain in Tennessee to be used for new church starts.

Messengers adopted resolutions on prayer for revival and spiritual awakening

The \$4,997,991 budget is a \$258,540 — 5.46% — increase over 1999. It includes a projected \$2,633,316 to the SBC Cooperative Program, which remains at 31% of the Northwest CP total after the convention's payment on its Northwest Baptist Center in Vancouver, Wash., which opened in 1997.

Messengers also welcomed eight new congregations to the Northwest Baptist Convention, (NWBC) including the region's first Russian congregation, four Korean congregations, and one each Hispanic, predominantly African American and predominantly Anglo congregations. The NWBC's approximately 420 congregations in Washington, Oregon and northern Idaho worship Sundays in 17 languages.

NEW MEXICO

LAS CRUCES, N.M. (BP) — Baptists from across New Mexico gathered in Las Cruces to affirm God's holiness during the 87th annual meeting of the Baptist Convention of New Mexico (BCNM) Oct. 26-27.

The 375 registered messengers and 235 visitors were hosted by one of the state convention's founding congregations, First Church, Las Cruces, which invited the convention to help it

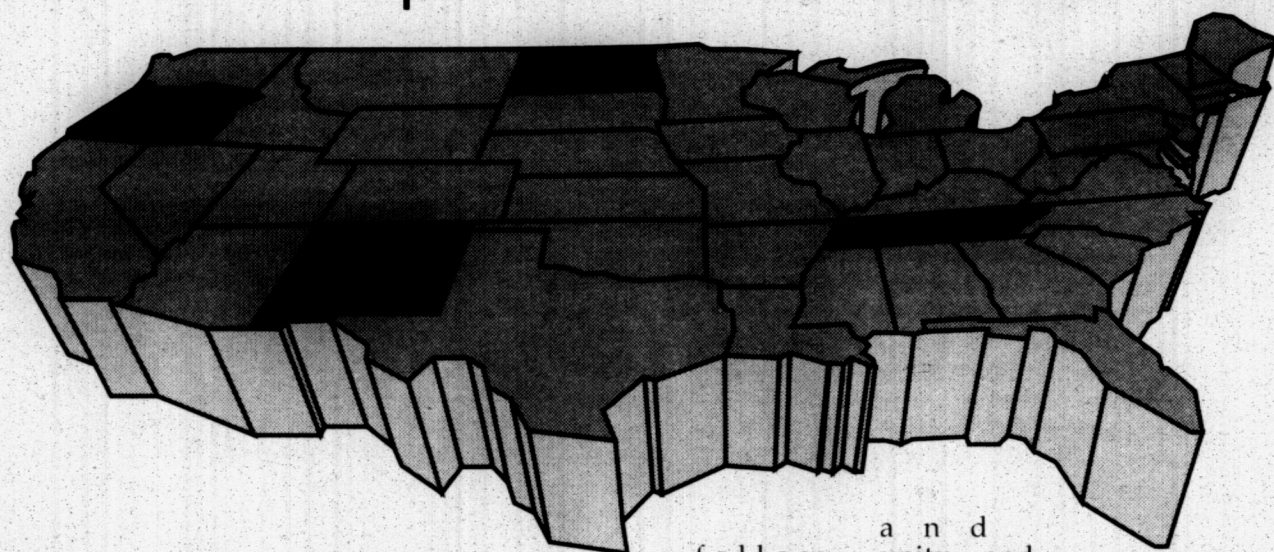
celebrate its 100th birthday.

Decrying the recent call by New Mexico Gov. Gary Johnson for the legalization of drugs, a resolution also was adopted to encourage Johnson "to reverse this most destructive and immoral position ..."

A BCNM budget for the year 2000 was approved, which will require \$3,145,003 in Cooperative Program giving from the churches, an increase of \$51,804, or 1.7%, over the 1999 budget.

After the exception of \$77,000 in preferred items (ministers' retirement and retirees' insurance) is applied, 30.5% of the Cooperative Program receipts, an estimated \$935,741, will be forwarded to the Southern Baptist Convention for national and international missions and ministry. The percentage is unchanged from last year.

The remaining 69.5%, \$2,132,262, along with additional income of \$1,066,118 from various sources — Baptist New Mexican subscriptions and advertising, Baptist Building rental income, and the SBC's North American Mission Board and LifeWay Christian Resources — will be used to support a total operating budget of \$3,198,380 for mission work in New Mexico.



E.J. Johnson, missionary, dies at age 94

Elizabeth Jackson Johnson, 94, of Churchland House, Portsmouth, Va., died Dec. 3, following a short illness. Born in Santa Rita, Bahia, Brazil, she was the daughter of pioneer missionaries Ernest Alonzo Jackson and Jannette Beazley Jackson. She served with her husband, the late Robert Elton Johnson, as missionaries in Brazil for 37 years with the Foreign Mission Board.



Johnson

A memorial service was conducted Dec. 6 at the Churchland Church in Portsmouth.

Survivals include a daughter, Virginia J. Fairley of Clinton, who works in the Partnership Missions department of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board.

Memorials may be sent to the Jackson-Johnson Memorial Scholarship Fund, c/o International Mission Board, SBC, P. O. Box 6767, Richmond, Va. 23230-0767.

and fellowship's executive director, recounted to the 113 messengers at the convention various evidences of spiritual awakening in the fellowship.

In elections by acclamation, Ron Rich, pastor of Riverwood, was re-elected as president, while new officers include Jodie Robinson, pastor of Mobridge (S.D.) Southern Baptist Church, as vice president and Karen Hall, a pastor's wife from Foothills Community Baptist Church, Piedmont, S.D., as recording secretary.

A fellowship budget of \$1,097,000 was adopted, roughly the same as the current budget. The year-2000 goal includes an anticipated \$190,000 in Cooperative Program giving from the fellowship's congregations, of which 14% will continue to be forwarded to Southern Baptist Convention national and international missions and ministries.

Next year's annual meeting will be Oct. 26-27 at Capitol Heights Baptist Church, Pierre, S.D.

TENNESSEE

FRANKLIN, Tenn. (BP) — Tennessee Baptist Convention (TBC) messengers adopted a budget of \$33,653,770 for 1999-2000, a 6.6% increase over the previous year. The amount sent to

and unity and reconciliation.

The resolution on prayer for revival and spiritual awakening calls for four sustained initiatives of fervent prayer in the year 2000, including four designated Wednesday nights when all TBC churches will be encouraged and equipped to call fervent meetings of corporate prayer for revival and spiritual awakening.

The resolution on unity and reconciliation calls on Tennessee Baptists to "earnestly strive to love one another, to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace, and to encourage and build one another up as the Scripture requires."

OREGON

EUGENE, Ore. (BP) — A goal of 10,000 baptisms in 2000 was set by Northwest Baptists during their Nov. 9-11 annual meeting — a goal that would more than triple the expected 1999 total of about 3,000 baptisms in Washington, Oregon and northern Idaho.

The messengers elected a slate of three officers — President Phil Peters, pastor of First Church, Drain, Ore.; First Vice President Carlton Butler, retired pastor and volunteer church builder; and Second Vice President Ted Haws, pastor of Trinity Church, Lebanon, Ore. — and approved a \$4,997,991 budget.



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Supreme Court to decide 'signal bleed' cable case

WASHINGTON (BP) — Congress should be able to require cable television operators, not parents, to bear the burden of blocking out programming on sexually explicit channels not subscribed to by families, the Justice Department told the Supreme Court Nov. 30. The justices heard oral arguments in a case involving a 1996 congressional measure requiring cable companies to scramble totally the transmissions on pornographic channels, such as Playboy, that have not been ordered by subscribers. The law was passed to deal with a problem known as "signal bleed," in which video and audio portions of sexually explicit programming appear in homes where that premium channel has not been subscribed. Under the law, cable companies must limit the transmission of such channels to the period between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m. if they do not prevent "signal bleed." A decision is expected before the end of the session next summer.

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USE MISS. EVANGELISTS

Editor:

As I have served the past year as secretary/treasurer of the Conference of Mississippi Baptist Evangelists (COMBE), it has been my pleasure to get to know the fine group of men and women who God has called to full time vocational evangelism from Mississippi.

It is my prayer that our Mississippi Baptist churches would begin now to pray about how God will lead them to use one or more of our vocational evangelists in their churches in the coming year.

God has called and uniquely qualified these men and women to serve his church in the all-important task of winning people to Christ.

I would urge our pastors and church leaders to begin today to make plans to include these servants of God in their service this next year. I would urge all of you to select one of our Mississippi evangelists and support them in prayer and financially if you can, because the life of a vocational evangelist is a tough one, with many days and weeks spent on the road away from family and home. As Mississippi Baptists let's do our part to make their ministry a success.

If you would like a listing of COMBE members you may request one at (888) 939-3277, or visit our webpage at www.kingdomgrowth.com and select COMBE or visit our display table at the Mississippi Baptist Evangelism Conference Jan. 21-22 at Ridgecrest Church, Madison.

Tom Posey
Sec./Treas., COMBE
LOCATION

KING COMMENDED


Editor:

Thank you for the article you ran announcing the death of Kermit King. I was one of many youth who was influenced by him and his leadership in Mississippi Baptist work.

I first met him while I was a youth at First Church, Vicksburg. Our friendship grew over the years through the interest he took in me. He was responsible for my first

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visit to Ridgecrest, which led to my staying there for the remainder of that summer as a staffer. That experience remains one of my fondest summer memories.

While at Ridgecrest, I met a number of other staffers who were students at Mississippi College (MC). These friendships led me to choose MC as my alma mater. So, Kermit was instrumental in shaping my future in a very real way.

Kermit was a dedicated servant of God. He was a man who cared about young people. I will miss him.

Gregory R. Versen
Harrisonburg, Va.

Editor:

Kermit S. King died Oct. 30. It is with great gratitude (that I) remember him.

For some 50-plus years, this man was called to minister to people especially young and elderly. He did so without recognition and did not feel that he missed anything in the process. His goal was to observe changes in people. He achieved this in many ways. His words were orthopraxy as much as orthodoxy. God and Kermit talked to each other and Kermit listened and responded as directed.

He never accumulated wealth; his stewardship was with God and the people. He was a preacher (proclaimer) and ordained as a deacon.

His labor was observed by people, fellow-workers and friends. The one thing all of us know — Kermit took it all with him as God welcomed Kermit to God's heaven.

Karl Seepe
Clinton

GAMBLING: FACTS ABSENT

Editor's note: Following is a letter written to James A. Walters, chairman of the Mississippi Baptist Christian Action Commission, in response to Walters' anti-gambling commentary in the December 11 issue of The Clarion-Ledger newspaper in Jackson.

Dr. Walters:

Thanks for your great article (regarding Mississippi Baptists being) committed to fighting gambling.

One of the key issues with gambling is the absence of facts. This guy wrote a letter to the paper and said that gambling is the only opportunity for people to get ahead. I called him and offered to teach him

many ways to succeed that would be much better than gambling. He was so brainwashed by ignorance that he was offended by my offer and hung up.

Gambling is not the issue. Excessive government is the root cause of the gambling problem — government refusing to do what it should do and doing what it should not do.

Government has no business saying who can gamble or where, any more than saying who can or where they can play the stock market or farm or run any kind of business, all of which requires taking risks which is a form of gambling.

The difference is all the rest have to disclose the truth but gambling places don't. That raises the question: Which one and how many of our lawmakers who passed the crooked gambling laws are religious leaders?

Excessive gambling is one of the byproducts of improper conduct of both government and citizens. Most of mankind's progress is made by people being active and getting guidance from God as to what to do and then doing it.

Again I thank you for a good article. Informing people is the big challenge that we all face today.

Roy T. Lewis
Jackson

GOD AT WORK

Editor:

As a member of Sardis Church who is disabled and can't attend, I enjoy the tape ministry. I would like to put this praise report in The Baptist Record.

Sardis is a beautiful little white country church which

was established in 1908. In the past couple of years the church has been redecorated, a baptistry installed, and a new nursery added. We now have six-plus babies including twin boys.

Early this year with Stanley Barnett serving as interim pastor, the church licensed two young men to the ministry, Leavy Shoffner, age 16, still in high school, and Stacy Madison just out of college.

In February, Madison became our pastor and Shoffner is doing supply preaching. Our attendance has almost doubled. Madison baptized 12 converts with more to be baptized.

God is at work in our church and we thank God and give him the glory.

Mary Molpus
Philadelphia

ON TO CHICAGO

Editor:

Speaking in response to Paige Patterson, our Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) president, on Southern Baptists going to Chicago, I agree on his every single point.

The Roman officer, seeking only a word from Jesus to cure his servant, was not American, or Baptist, and probably not a Mason, but Christ responded, "I have not found a greater faith in all Israel." Not only did he become Christian, surely, but also would — no, should — have been embraced by any of the other groups.

We all struggle against the principalities and powers and should not judge, especially to condemnation. I am glad to see those basic values set forth by our SBC president (as we) go to Chicago and all the earth.

R. Dale Howe
Coldwater

Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions

1998 Top Ten Churches

TOTAL GIFTS

1. First Church, Jackson	\$255,000
2. First Church, Natchez	\$127,252
3. First Church, Columbus	\$122,871
4. Broadmoor Church, Jackson	\$105,644
5. First Church, Starkville	\$86,086
6. First Church, Clinton	\$63,941
7. Colonial Heights, Jackson	\$55,000
8. Temple, Hattiesburg	\$51,879
9. Parkway, Clinton	\$47,857
10. Harrisburg Church, Tupelo	\$47,273

PER MEMBER GIFTS

1. Yellow Leaf Church, Oxford	\$81.06
2. First Church, Natchez	\$70.38
3. Springdale Church, Ripley	\$70.26
4. Antioch Church, Golden	\$69.34
5. Faith Church, Jackson	\$66.17
6. Oak Grove Church, Lake	\$60.07
7. Highland Colony Church, Ridgeland	\$52.48
8. First Church, Columbus	\$49.89
9. Liberty Church, Toomsaba	\$49.73
10. Hazel Church, Lake	\$46.61



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Unsigned letters will not be printed. No multi-copy or form letters will be used.

Each correspondent must include an address and telephone number for verification. In special instances, name may be withheld at writer's request and editor's discretion.

Please include the name of cooperating Mississippi Baptist church where correspondent is a member. (Mississippi Baptists' letters will receive priority when space is limited.)

Letters must be limited to 250 words. All correspondence is subject to editing.

Correspondents should refrain from personal attacks. The opinions expressed in letters to the editor do not necessarily reflect the views of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board.

No more than one letter from any individual will be printed during a three-month period.

When in the judgement of the editor a given issue has received sufficient attention, correspondence dealing with it will no longer be published and a notice will be printed to that effect.

the
Unfinished Task
1999

Loving the Lost

Matthew 28:19

Lottie Moon
Christmas Offering for
International Missions

NATIONAL GOAL:
\$125 million

LIFE AND WORK

The Wise Men: determined worshipers

Matthew 2:1-12

By Michael Jones



Jones

There is much talk these days about which form of worship is the right one. Is it contemporary or traditional, using hymns or praise choruses? Should it be with an organ and piano, or with a praise band? Whatever the answer, worship has one goal: to lift up the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The wise men who came to see the baby Jesus are a great example of what happens to cause worship, as well as what

happens during worship.

Worship does not just happen on Sunday mornings or just with hymns or choruses. Worship happens when we have a desire to worship, when we prepare for worship, and when we express it properly.

Desire to worship (vv. 1-2). The wise men came because they had seen a sign; the star in the east. They came seeking "the one who has been born King of the Jews." They came seeking to worship this new King.

When we come to worship, do we come seeking to worship the King? Many times we may go to what we call worship out of a sense of responsibility or habit. The wise men came to worship out of desire. This is where true worship begins. The desire to worship him comes out of the recognition that Jesus is the King of kings. Worship is not done for any other reason.

Overcome obstacles to worship (vv. 3-8). When King Herod heard about the wise men coming to worship the King, he attempted to take advantage of their journey. Having found out from the chief priests where the King was to be born, he instructed the wise men to report to him when they had found the King.

The wise men, however, would not be used. They would not allow Herod to distract them from their search for the new born King.

When we come seeking God in worship, we too must put aside all distractions. We must put aside the barriers which prevent us from worshipping the King. With the same determination of the wise men we must worship the King.

How easy it is to be distracted in our worship, like worrying about events in our life, or thinking about the non important, mundane issues which fill our lives, or even being distracted from worship by others in our lives. We prepare for worship by being mindful of these things but deciding to not let them obstruct our worship.

Express worship (vv. 9-12).

The wise men continued following the star they had seen until it "stopped over the place where the child was." Here we read they were overjoyed and worshiped the King. Then, they presented him with their gifts of gold, incense, and myrrh.

Giving is an expression of worship. It involves giving to God through our time, talents, and tithe. It begins, though, with the initial giving to God the gift of ourselves.

The wise men brought gifts to the King as an act of worship. When we come to worship the King, we should bring him the gift of ourselves, humble, obedient, and desiring to worship him.

What happens when you worship?

Jones is associate pastor/youth minister at Monticello Church, Monticello.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Live in truth

1 John 2:18-27

By Carl M. White



White

A friend e-mailed me a poem that starts like this:

T'was the night before New Year's and all thru the nation

We waited the bug, the millennium sensation.

All the chips were replaced in computers with care

In hopes that ol' buggy wouldn't stop there . . .

Doomsday prophets have cried "the sky is falling" loud enough to be heard by virtually everyone. Some are going to be disappointed on January 1 when the world doesn't come to an end. The truth is, God will bring about Armageddon in his timing and in his way.

Y2K is really rather arbitrary. It is happening because centuries ago someone guessed when the birth of Jesus was and started counting. What if they got it wrong by a few years?

As believers, our concern should not be for Y2K but for JCS — Jesus Christ Saves. As today's lesson demonstrates, doomsday prophets have been around for a long, long time.

Understanding antichrist (vv. 18-21). Notice how John distinguishes between "antichrist" and "antichrists" in verse 18. The singular "antichrist" is part of the scriptural reference to the future

coming of the "man of lawlessness" Paul wrote about in 2 Thess. 2:3 and the book of The Revelation refers to with the number 666.

The plural "antichrists" is a reference to false teachers. John indicates that the end of times will be characterized by many false antichrists.

In verse 19 he makes a surprising statement. Those he calls false antichrists came from the church. However, he is careful to point out, though they had been part of the fellowship of the church, they were never really "of us," he says. This means, they were never really believers.

Jesus spoke of this when he gave the parable of the sower. Some of his sown seed fell on rocky and weed-filled soil. Thus, the gospel never takes root. They were never really

saved. As long ago as the time of the Apostle John, there was a problem with unbelievers in the church.

Confessing Jesus is the Christ (vv. 22-23). Here is how false antichrists are identified — they deny Christ.

The word Christ means messiah. The confessional statement of the church is Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God and Savior of the world. Anyone who denies this is not the antichrist, but reflects the spirit of antichrist.

A person comes to know the Father through the Son. Jesus himself said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me." (John 14:6 NASB) In all that we do in the church, we must never get away from the simple confession of faith that Jesus IS the Christ.

Abiding in the truth (vv. 24-27). John's advice to the believers of his day, and the Holy

Spirit's word to believers of today, is to "abide" in the truth about Christ.

Abide means to remain in relationship with something. Thus, in these unsettling times with talk about Y2K, the Christian's answer is to abide in Christ.

The Bible indicates a certain result. Abiding in Christ means spiritual fruitfulness (John 15:5); it means answered prayer (John 15:7); it means peace (John 16:33); it means new life (2 Cor. 5:17); and it means righteousness (Phil. 3:9).

In addition, verse 27 indicates that abiding with Christ brings a certain "anointing" which is a form of protection from false teachers and false teachings. We need this anointing next week as we end the 1900s and begin with year 2000.

White is a member of First Church, Clinton.

FAMILY BIBLE SERIES

Time of worshipping

Matthew 2:1-12

By Lynn Jones



Jones

The reference department in a university library received a piece of mail with an unusual name on the front. The letter was addressed to the "Reverence Department." It seems to me that all of us ought to have one of those.

Christmas produces many reactions on our part — excitement, joy, expectation. One of our responses to Christmas should be reverence. What an awesome event Christmas is! This mighty gift of God should move us to reverence and worship. We can learn about that from the wise men, who came to Christ at the first Christmas.

Time to seek (vv. 1-2). The

wise men or "magi," were a group of learned men who probably had come from Babylon. In Babylon they may have learned from the Jews about their expectation of a Messiah. When they saw the star from their home in the east, they saw this as a signal that the Messiah had been born.

Although Jesus had been born in Bethlehem, the wise men expected that this "King of the Jews" had been born in the capital city of Jerusalem. Their purpose in coming was to worship him.

Worshipping God is the most important thing that we can do at Christmas time. Sadly, that sometimes gets lost in the

Christmas shuffle. Like the wise men, we need to plan specific ways of worshipping the Lord during this important season.

Time to learn (v. 3-6). Herod the Great was king of Judea at this time. When he learned of the birth of a new "king," he was troubled.

The entire city of Jerusalem was worried because Herod's insecurity had often prompted rash behavior on his part.

Herod asked the religious leaders what the Bible said about the birth of Christ. The Jewish leaders quoted Micah 5:2 which identified Bethlehem as the place of his birth. Herod was ignorant of the Bible's contents, and the religious leaders had only an academic knowledge of its contents. Neither of them came to Jesus.

The purpose of the Bible is to lead us to the feet of the Savior. At this season of the

year, we warm our hands around the fire. We need to warm our hearts around the Word of God. As we do so, his Word can lead us to the feet of Jesus for salvation and fellowship with him.

Time to act (vv. 7-8). Herod knew where Christ was supposed to be born. He then asked the wise men when the star appeared so that he could learn the time of Christ's birth. Finally, he needed to know the exact location of the child so he sent the wise men to Bethlehem to find out. Herod claimed that he would come later to worship the child. His claim reminds us of the excuses that we and others sometimes produce in order to avoid genuine worship.

Time to give (vv. 9-12). The miraculous star led the wise men from Bethlehem to the very house where Jesus was. The fact that the wise men came to a "house" where Jesus was, rather than a stable

probably means that they arrived at the end of their long trip several weeks after his birth. This impression is strengthened by the fact that Jesus is called a "young child" rather than a baby.

When the wise men had entered the house, they gave Jesus gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. These were very valuable gifts which expressed the adoration of these visitors from the East. Genuine worship is always marked by sacrificial giving.

A man gave a very large sum of money to a Christian university. The university's director of giving asked, "In whose name would you like to give this gift?" The man responded, "In the name of Jesus Christ!" At this Christmas season, when we think of God's great gift of his Son, this should move us to genuine worship and sacrificial giving.

Jones is pastor of First Church, Booneville.

FAMILY BIBLE SERIES

Focus on commitment

Matthew 4:18-22; 9:9-12; 10:1-4

By Lynn Jones

Much of the religion of our day has been called "hot tub religion." That is religion that makes you feel good but asks nothing of you.

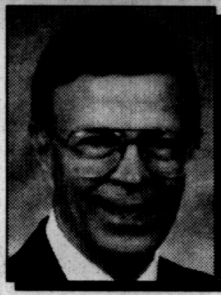
That is a far cry from the Christianity on the pages of the New Testament. When Jesus Christ came to invite persons to follow him, he asked a lot of them. He asked them to commit themselves without reservation to him and to his redemptive purposes. He still asks for that kind of commitment today.

Commitment's price (4:18-22). Jesus had met Peter, Andrew, James, and John earlier (John 1:35-42). They had spent some time with him, but

they had not made a commitment to follow him all of the time. Jesus now approached them along the Sea of Galilee, probably near their home town of Capernaum. He first asked Peter and Andrew to follow him. A little later he asked James and John, who were partners in the fishing business (Luke 5:10), to do the same.

The response of these first disciples was identical. They immediately left their fishing business and followed him. They did not try to excuse themselves or to resist the invitation. They were willing to leave the security of their business and to follow Jesus.

Football coach Lou Holtz was once asked after a game



Jones

about his team's performance. He remarked that the players seemed to lack commitment to what they were doing. He said, "They remind me of the kamikaze pilot who flew 31 missions."

These first disciples made no halfway commitment. They walked away from their nets and boats and never came back. Christ is still looking for disciples who are willing to pay the price of commitment.

Commitment's purpose (9:9-12). The account of Matthew's call to be a disciple is similar to that of the earlier disciples. This call also occurred near Capernaum and was a call to total commitment.

Matthew was a tax collector for the Roman government. From his tax office in Capernaum, he probably collected taxes on goods that passed through the city on the trade routes that ran through the area.

Because he was a Jewish citizen who collected taxes for the Romans, Matthew was disliked by his fellow citizens.

Although many disliked Matthew, Jesus cared about him and saw the enormous potential in his life. When Matthew responded to Jesus' call, he invited his fellow tax collectors and other social outcasts to his home to eat with Jesus. The Pharisees criticized Jesus for this, but he defended his actions. He likened himself to a physician who goes out to help sick people.

What would you think of a physician who came to your town but refused to have anything to do with sick people? What if he only wanted to spend his time with people who were well? Obviously, such a physician would be of little value. The whole purpose of his education and training is to enable him to help sick people. In the same way, Christians are responsible for reaching out to

those who are spiritually sick and bringing them to Jesus Christ who can make them well.

Commitment's power (10:1-4). The followers of Jesus are called "disciples" (v. 1) and "apostles" (v. 2). "Disciples" are "learners." "Apostles" are ones who are sent on a mission. Followers of Christ are to learn about him, and then they are to go out and share with others. After calling the 12, Jesus sent them out on mission.

Before Jesus sent the 12 out on their first mission, he "gave them power" for their work of ministry. They were not going in their own power, but they were going in the power of the Lord.

A plain piece of copper wire has limited possibilities. But when you charge that wire with 110 volts of electricity, the possibilities become almost endless. When God fills you with his power, the possibilities for effective service are tremendous!

Jones is pastor of First Church, Booneville.

LIFE AND WORK

A world to manage

Gen. 2:15; 2 Chron. 7:11-16; Ps. 8:6-8; 24:1; 115:16; Hos. 4:1-3

By Michael Jones

The next millennium is upon us. If we listen to scientists, the outlook for this next 1000 years is not very promising, with global warming, contaminated streams and rivers, entire species being wiped out due to the depletion of the rain forest, and a list that could go on and on. What is our role as Christians in regard to the environment? Do we have a duty and a responsibility?

Many Christians have taken the stand that God is in control

and scientists do not know what they are talking about. Indeed, God is in control and, although the scientists may not know what they are talking about, Christians do have a role and a responsibility when it comes to our world. In fact, we will find in today's lesson we are the responsible ones. We have the vital role.

God owns everything (Ps. 24:1; 115:16). In chapter 24, the Psalmist makes it very clear the earth belongs to God. Not many of us would dispute this. We realize the earth belongs to



Jones

God. Our problem is that many times we tend to believe that we also own the earth. This is not so. In fact, we do not own anything. We are just given the earth to use, not to possess. How does this relate to our lesson? The "role" we have is that of tenant farmer just using the land.

God made us caretakers (Gen. 2:15; Ps. 8:6-8). The "responsibility" we have for our world is to rule over it as a manager or caretaker. Recognizing that we are not owners but managers and caretakers, Christians cannot use the world's resources however we see fit. Instead, we are to care for its resources and be good stewards of what the owner has given us to use. Being a caretaker also involves guarding our world. In Gen. chapter two, Adam was

given his assignment to "guard" what God had given. It is now our watch.

We can inflict terrible damage (Hos. 4:1-3). Unfortunately, another "role" we play in our world is that of destroyer. Hosea is very clear in this passage that our sins affect us and the world around us. Because of the sins of the Israelites, the land and animals on the land were dying. As Christians, our lives do affect our world and our environment. Our sins can destroy our moral and physical environment. The choices we make in our lives to sin directly damage our world. It has a ripple affect.

God can repair the damage (2 Chron. 7:13-14). In this final passage we see our last "role" in our world, which involves having the responsibility to be the agent of change. Verse 14 is an often quoted passage but rarely is it quoted in the context of

verse 13: "If I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or if I command the locust to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among My people." (NASB)

The context is the condition of the world, and the environment. It mentions drought and plagues. We can be an agent of change by humbling ourselves before God and seeking his forgiveness. When we as Christians do this — not those who don't know Christ — God will hear our prayers and heal our land. What a "role"!

What is our role? It is to be caretakers of God's earth, not damaging it with our sins, by humbly seeking God's face and forgiveness. We have the most important role in our world and environment. Let's take this role seriously!

Jones is associate pastor/youth minister at Monticello Church, Monticello.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Pursuing righteousness

1 John 2:28-3:10

By Carl M. White

There is a preoccupation these days with the Second Coming of Christ. As part of the millennium fascination, many are speculating about the return of Christ. Rather than pursuing the right interpretation of the end of times, Christians should be pursuing a right relationship with God and with others. John indicates that these are the two areas that matter most, not predicting the Lord's return.

The confidence of obedience (2:28-29). This is what John is trying to say to the first century church, and what the Word of

God is saying to the church of today. Whenever his coming, our primary concern should be preparation, not prediction. Confidence in the face of the end times comes not from detailed knowledge of the latest apocalyptic theories, but from a relationship with Christ. If you are going about the business of sharing the love of God with others, then you are as ready as you need to be for his return.

The purifying hope (3:1-3). In verse three John says, "everyone who has THIS HOPE fixed on him purifies himself." (emphasis added)



White

What is this hope?

First of all, this hope is found in a relationship. We are his children. Confirmation of this relationship comes from a rather unusual source: the condemnation of the world. Just as the world didn't know him, it does not recognize us. Post-modern philosopher and theologian Leonard Sweet says that the greatest sin of the church today is we have become "of" the world. According to the Word of God, the praise of society is not a virtue for the church.

Second, our hope looks forward to a coming identity; we will be like him. This is a mystery in part, because we do not yet see him. The result of this relationship and identity is hope, but not just any hope. It is a hope that purifies.

The righteousness of Jesus (3:4-7). Many biblical scholars recognize that John speaks here in rather idealistic terms. The testimony of Scripture confirms the reality that Christians still sin. Here John is referring to an habitual lifestyle where a person seeks to justify their sinful behavior. This sinfulness is the equivalent of lawlessness, which is John's way of saying being outside of the law or rule of God. Someone who thus "practices sin" gives evidence they do not "abide in Christ."

Jesus is our ideal. He appeared not only to take away our sin, but to show us how to live above our sinfulness. Thus, anyone who abides in him moves to a higher ethical level. In verse seven, John finally states this truth in a straightforward fashion; "the

one who practices righteousness is righteous."

The test of righteousness (3:8-10). The final test of our relationship with Christ is determined by our relationships. John's words come in the context of false teaching which had caused the confidence of these believers to be shaken. According to John it is this simple: The people of God are the ones who do the things of God, and the people of the devil are the ones who do the things of the devil.

The ultimate test is twofold: the righteousness of God, and the love of humanity. Practicing and doing what is right and loving others demonstrates a person's relationship with God.

To what does your life give testimony?

White is a member of First Church, Clinton.

Students give \$3.5 million to missions in '99

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP) — College students from across the country gave \$3.5 million to missions in 1999.

"That's new money, money they raised or earned themselves," said Bill Henry, director of the National Student Ministries department of LifeWay Christian Resources in Nashville. "That's not money that moms and dads gave them."



HEART FOR MISSIONS — College students from across the country gave \$3.5 million to missions in 1999. A check was presented to LifeWay President James T. Draper Jr. (center) and Morris H. Chapman, president of the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee (left) by Bill Henry, director, National Collegiate Ministry. (BP photo by Morris Abernathy)

Students raised the money by bake sales and car washes, as well as more creative means. One Baptist Student Union (BSU) group wrapped gifts at a local Wal-Mart store. Wal-Mart made a donation to the BSU for the students' work instead of just hiring another worker. On another campus, students made pledges. One student pledged the money he had planned to use to eat out after church on Sunday. He ate in the campus cafeteria instead.

Thanking the group of state student work directors and assistant directors, Draper told them he believed the greatest mission field in America is the college campus. "Student ministry is not easy. You've got everyone involved with what you do. You've got LifeWay, the IMB [International Mission Board], NAMB [North American Mission Board], your state conventions and the churches."

Meeting in Nashville, Tenn., Dec. 5-7, the student work directors heard about two books being written for use in gender-specific ministry for college students.

"Virtuous Reality, becoming the ideal woman," by Vicki Courtney, founder of Cross Roads Women's Ministry, is directed toward college-age women. "My real passion is to get an accurate message out to these college women that God has a different definition of the ideal woman than what the world says is ideal."

The book uses the woman cited in

Proverbs 31 to show what God wants a woman to become.

"A woman is not the 'ideal woman' because she can bake the perfect biscuit and sew her own clothes, but she becomes ideal by putting God in the very center of her life," Courtney said.

She said she hopes college women will use the book as a tool for finding what the ideal woman is in the eyes of God.

Student minister Gregg Matte has written "The Highest Education, becoming a godly man," aimed toward college-age men.

Henry said Matte has an "amazing ministry" with college students. Each week Matte speaks to about 5,000 students at Texas A&M University in College Station, Texas.

When the NSM staff approached Matte about writing a book for college men, Matte quickly agreed.

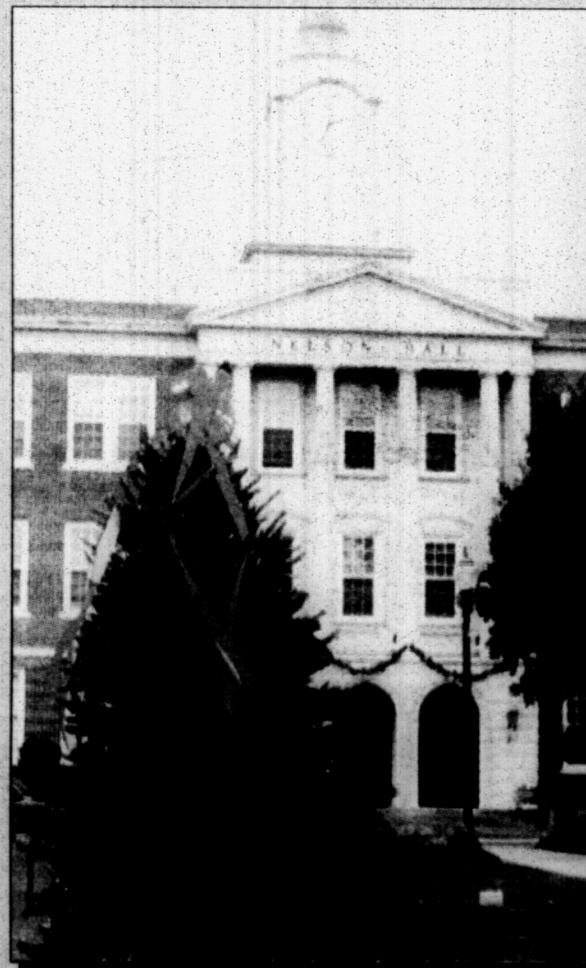
He quoted Matte as saying, "This is unbelievable. My wife and I have been praying for the last month about what God wants us to do next."

Henry noted that Matte "already had a plan in mind for what he wanted to write."

"College students are at a point in their lives when they are making lifestyle decisions that will follow them the rest of their lives. It's exciting to know they are learning how to be disciples for Christ and are equipping themselves for a lifetime of service," he said.

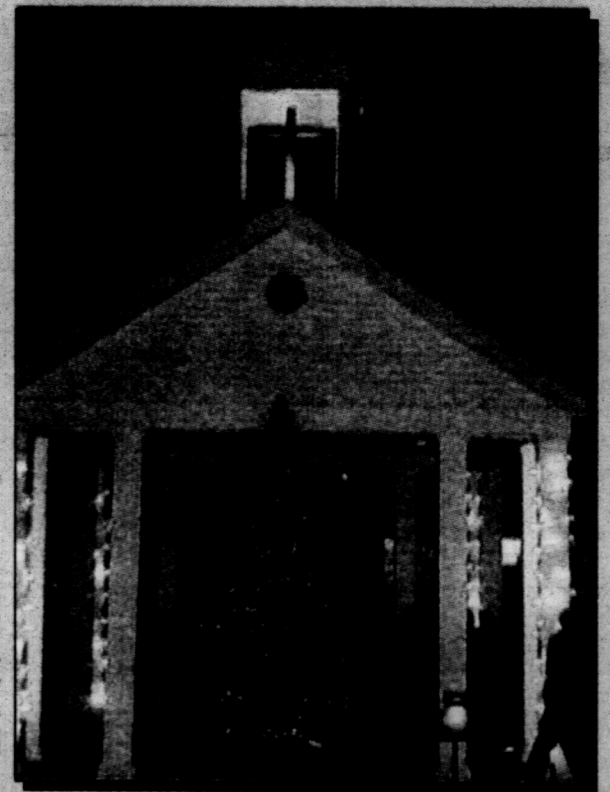
A collegiate kind of Christmas in Mississippi

Mississippi Baptists are blessed with three schools of higher education: Blue Mountain College in Blue Mountain; Mississippi College in Clinton; and William Carey College in Hattiesburg. Each year the campuses are decorated for the Christmas season. The Baptist Record asked each school to provide a color photograph of the decorations on campus for the enjoyment of our readers and the schools' supporters.



CHRISTMAS AT MISSISSIPPI COLLEGE (above) — Wreaths and red ribbon adorn Nelson Hall on the campus of Mississippi College in Clinton. Each year the college presents several seasonal programs, such as Festival of Lights in Provine Chapel, for the campus and community featuring various performing groups from the School of Music.

CHRISTMAS AT CAREY (right) — The Student Government Association Christmas Tree, illuminated on December 3, occupies the middle of Estelle Willis Tower at the Marjorie and Earl Kelly Missions Plaza on the campus of William Carey College (WCC) in Hattiesburg. The tree lighting ceremony marks the traditional beginning of the Christmas celebration on the WCC campus.



CHRISTMAS AT BLUE MOUNTAIN (below) — The entry to the Blue Mountain College campus is decorated for the holiday season. Other buildings on campus are decked with greenery and red ribbons as the students participate in several Christmas programs and celebrations.



Bibliocipher

By Charles Marx
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ZI XF FUGKLF EPHNY-
FUZUC, CJG GFHAFYP
RZYP XJK HN RZYP NJUN;
IJL RPHY NJU ZN PF
RPJW YPF IHYPFL EPHNY-
FUFYP UJY?

PFDLFRN YRFAQF: NFQFU

Clue: I = F

Have fun with cryptography and exercise your Bible knowledge. A King James Version Bible verse has been encoded by letter substitution. The same letter is substituted throughout the puzzle. Solve by trial and error. Answer to last week's puzzle: Second Peter One: Two.